

March 8, 2005

Congressman Christopher Smith
Chairman, House International Relations
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations
2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to express my strong support for The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005 (H.R. 972). This significant legislation provides important new tools for combating international and domestic sex trafficking, assisting trafficking victims, ensuring that U.S. government personnel who exploit children overseas are punished, encouraging increased enforcement against unlawful commercial sexual activity and protecting women and children in post-conflict situations and humanitarian crises from traffickers.

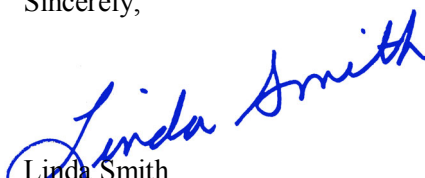
Shared Hope International exists to rescue and restore women and children in crisis. Working with local partners, we have helped establish Homes of Hope in seven countries that provide victims with food and shelter, access to medical care, vocational training, education and identification and outreach services.

I strongly support the provisions in H.R.972 that will enhance services for international and domestic trafficking victims. Creating a pilot project for programs will establish a basis for best-practices and development of services around the world. We have found that severely abused women and youth like those who have been trafficked and forced to participate in the commercial sex industry, need long-term care in "home" settings. They need a safe place to recover, learn job skills, and regain their dignity. I am pleased that this legislation recognizes the need for long-term care and hope that U.S. support for these programs will increase over time.

I also commend you for including provisions that will help protect women and children in post-conflict situations or humanitarian crises from traffickers. The Tsunami in Asia brought to light the risks for women and children that exist in many countries when disaster strikes. When children lose their parents or women lose their husbands, they are left without a source of livelihood and can fall prey to the many traffickers who are active in those countries. Trafficking is not a new phenomenon in most of the countries affected by the Tsunami, but it did create an expanded group of vulnerable victims. I commend you for recognizing this international problem and taking steps to prevent it.

I have seen first hand through the travel and implementation of our programs in 14 countries the difference the Trafficking Victims Protection Act is making on the willingness of governments to take real action to prevent this crime. H.R.972 builds on the solid foundation laid by the TVPA and is a crucial tool in our fight against trafficking around the world.

Sincerely,



Linda Smith
Founder and Executive Director
Shared Hope International